March — April 2005

HLS threats major topic at conference

Perspectives for state and national emergency management programs highlighted the 2005 Partners in Preparedness Conference in Bellevue's Double Tree Hotel.

The conference, which attracted more than 550 participants from government, private businesses, non-profit organizations and educational institutions, featured a variety of topics covering homeland security issues including the new National Incident Management System (NIMS) and National Response Plan (NRP), said Mike Gordon, conference organizer and state training officer for the Emergency Management Division.

Because of the success of the conference, Gordon said conference sponsors would look to a larger facility to house the conference to accommodate an increasing number of vendors as well as a larger number of participants who are connected in some way to homeland security.

Conference keynote speaker Slade Gorton, former U.S. Senator from Washington and member of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, said



Members of the Disaster Medical Assistance Team from western Washington worked with 20 hospitals in northeast Washington and northern Idaho in a March 25 forward movement of patients exercise in Spokane. (Photo courtesy of HLS Region 9).

USGS survey rates four Washington volcanoes as very high threat

Four Washington volcanoes were among the 18 listed as a very high threat in a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Report issued in late April.

The report, which was the result of a two-year study, ranked the nation's 169 volcanoes according to the threat each poses. The report also discussed current monitoring efforts and identified gaps in monitoring these volcanoes.

In the report's threat analysis, volcanoes were categorized from a very low to a very high threat based on such factors as occurrence of unrest, frequency of past eruptions, and the tendency toward explosivity and the potential exposure to people, property, infrastructure and aviation.

The four Washington volcanoes listed as very high threats were Mounts Baker, Rainier and St. Helens and Glacier Peak. Mount Hood, which presents a lahar-induced flood risk along the Washington shore of the Columbia River, also was designated as a very high threat. Mount Adams was considered to be a high threat.

The USGS report called for improvement in monitoring of the nation's most dangerous volcanoes and the establishment of 24/7 volcano watch offices at each of the volcano observatories to

HLS threats highlight Conference

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much work remained to be done to protect our country and its citizens from terrorist attacks.

The war against terrorism will take decades to fight and will require the nation to take military action, improve home security preparedness and combat a terrorist philosophy that calls for destruction of Western civilization, he said.

Gorton said Congress has taken steps to implement several recommendations of the 9/11 Commission's report, including the unification of national intelligence-gathering agencies and the distribution of homeland security revenue based on risk.

But he said congressional oversight of the new Department of Homeland Security is still divided up among 79 different committees and subcommittees. "A great deal remains to be done" to streamline the Congress' review and approval process for homeland security issues, Gorton said.

James Mullen, EMD director, outlined a series of challenges in his overview of emergency management today in the state.

He urged local jurisdictions to address issues raised by the recent Seattle Fault earthquake study rather than to wait for federal action.

The South Asian tsunami response and recovery highlighted the need for public education as well as real time tests of evacuation procedures along the coast, he said.

"Let's not pretend we're ready" until there is a sustained public education program underway.

Mullen said EMD activities in the coming months will revolve around the implementation of the new NIMS and NRP. While the new federal plans are causing considerable anxiety among local jurisdictions, he said EMD would continue to provide assistance to local emergency management organizations.

Mullen said the Department of Homeland Security "is doing a lot of things right." But he emphasized that he will oppose federal attempts to change emergency preparedness into a new concept of prevention because some hazards like earthquakes and tsunamis can be prepared for, but not prevented.

SAR Conference Set May 16-22

Several hundred search and rescue workers from the U.S. and Canada are expected to attend the 2005 Washington State Search and Rescue Conference May 16-22 at Leavenworth, Wash.

Hosted by the Chelan County Sheriff's Office Special Operations Search and Rescue Unit, the conference will feature nearly 100 classes on subjects ranging from search and rescue management and wilderness and outdoor survival to canine searches.

UMCD resumes incineration

Destruction of chemical weapons resumed May 5 after a nearly a two-week stoppage at the Umatilla Chemical Depot (UMCD). Work had stopped following an April 23 fire at the depot's incinerator.

The fire broke out as an M55 rocket, containing GB Sarin nerve agent, was being cut up for incineration by automated machinery in the sealed, concrete-walled containment room. Water sprinklers dosed the burning rocket, and the room's ventilation system cut off oxygen, putting out the fire in about 15 minutes, according to depot officials.

No injuries were reported from the fire, but the incinerator was shut down while the cause of the fire was investigated.

Since incineration operations started last September, 12,828 rockets, or about 14 percent of those stored at the depot, have been destroyed.

USGS studies volcano risk

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improve volcano forecasts and se volcano watch offices would complement the operations of the National Earthquake Information Center, the Pacific and Alaska Tsunami Warning Centers and pertinent Department of Defense operations.

State drought to continue

Drought conditions are expected to worsen across Washington between now and July despite recent April rains, weather experts say.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency's (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center reported in late April that drought conditions had intensified in the Yakima River Basin and would persist or worsen across much of Washington by July. The only exception to this trend will be along the most western part of the state, including the Olympic Peninsula.

Recent rains had raised stream flows in western and north-central Washington into the normal range, while there was only slight improvement in the Columbia Basin, the center stated.

The center's report said stream flows in the Pacific Northwest overall were still a little below and forecast that flows would drop off in most Washington basins if a warm, dry weather trend carried into May.

The National Interagency Fire Center forecast called for an above normal potential for wildfires in Washington this summer.

NOAA's 120-day forecast predicted Washington would experience above normal temperatures for most of the summer with average rainfall.



Brig. Gen. Gordon Toney, (I) Assistant Adjutant General, Army, Washington Military Department, presents a Washington Air National Guard Distinguished Service Medal to Diane Offord, (r), manager of the Response and Recovery Unit of the Washington Emergency Management Division (EMD), in a ceremony March 16 in the State Emergency Operations Center at Camp Murray. (EMD Photo)

Offord honored for EMD service

Diane Offord, a veteran of 15 years of service with the Washington Emergency Management Division (EMD), left the agency March 16 to become Financial Services Chief Administrator for the state Department of Health.

Offord had served as an EMD unit manager since 1995, and she was the state coordinating officer for the following federal disasters: flooding in 1995 and 1996, severe winter storms in 1996, the Aldercrest landslide disaster in 1998, the Nisqually Earthquake of 2001, and the October 2003 flooding.

Gov. Christine Gregoire wrote in a letter of appreciation that Offord had worked with local, state and federal officials "to provide individuals, businesses, and communities with the much-needed resources that helped them get back on their feet after major disasters."

Offord had "consistently demonstrated compassionate professionalism and ...proven the power of responsive Government," the governor stated.

In a ceremony in the state's Emergency Operations Center, Offord also was presented a Washington Air National Guard Distinguished Service Medal; a Medallion from Maj. Gen. Timothy Lowenberg,

EMD staff recognition, awards

John Ufford was appointed permanent manager of the Analysis and Plans Section of the Mitigation, Analysis and Plans Unit on March 8. Ufford, who joined the Emergency Management Division in 2003, had served as Transportation Security Program Manager and as acting analysis and plans section manager.

Mark Ligman, Hazardous Materials/State Emergency Response Committee program manager in the Policy, Programs and Training Section of the Preparedness Unit, was honored April 28 for five years of state service. He came to EMD in October 1999.

Rosanne Garrand, training coordinator in the Policy, Programs and Training Section of the Preparedness Unit, received a letter of commendation April 28 from King County Office of Emergency Management for her participation in a simulation exercise of the King County Regional Disaster Plan earlier this year.

Cook named state HLS planner

Amy Cook was named to the position of state Homeland Security Strategic Planner in the Washington Military Department, effective May 2. She succeeded Nancy Bickford, who was appointed in late April as Special Assistant to Maj. Gen. Timothy J. Lowenberg.

Cook most recently served as the Senior Technology Planning Advisor for the Department of Information Services. In that role, she has led the Information Technology (IT) Sector group within the Committee on Homeland Security Infrastructure Protection Sub-committee and was recently nominated to chair the SIEC Advisory Funding Enterprise (SAFE) Working Group. She has more than eighteen years of state civilian and military service, including prior legal, operational, policy and law enforcement positions.

Offord honored for EMD service

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Military Department director and state adjutant general; a certificate of appreciation from John Pennington, director of Federal Emergency Management Agency Region 10; and a letter of appreciation from Jim Mullen, EMD director.

Offord told her EMD co-workers that she would miss their camaraderie but not the emergency pager notifications. "I have enjoyed working with so many professional, caring people, and am extremely proud of having been part of such a dynamic organization."

Chuck Hagerhjelm, manager of the mitigation section in the Mitigation, Analysis and Plans Unit, was named interim Response and Recovery Unit manager to replace Offord. Marty Best, state hazard mitigation program manager, will replace Hagerhjelm as acting mitigation section manager.

EMD website visits rise

Growth industry seems to be the appropriate title for the Washington Emergency Management website.

Page visits are climbing at a rate of about 150,000 per year, according to Dave Rider, EMD webmaster. "It's been going up every year very significantly."

Rider, who has managed the EMD site since 1998, pointed out that the 34,365 page visits recorded for all of 1999 is less than the 43,343 page visits made to the site in just the month of April 2005.

He said he was surprised that last year's 555,952 page visits easily exceeded the previous page visit record of 372,541 set in 2001 which featured the Nisqually Earthquake and the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

People are growing increasing familiar with the Internet, and EMD outreach programs have focused on providing material through the website, he said. Rider added that the most widely viewed EMD pages are on search and rescue and public education materials.

Rider said he has been successful in adding the EMD website to the powerful and widely-used Google search engine. The EMD site also has a front page link on the popular Access Washington site for the state of Washington.

Rider said access is a priority in the website design to help the slower speed computers to view the EMD pages.

Mount St. Helens erupted 25 years ago on May 18

Mount St. Helens disaster, the Emergency Responder reprints an article written in 2000 by the late Jimmie Hocutt, who was the information processing and telecommunications supervisor in the State Emergency Operations Center on May 18, 1980. Hocutt retired in 2001 after working 22 years in EMD and died in 2004 after a lengthy battle with cancer.

As part of a look back to the

For me personally, I am proud and honored to have been a part of such an historical event. My big personal regret was that I never visited the area to see the beauty of Spirit Lake before it was destroyed.

I am equally sad about the lives lost. Even though I didn't know any of the victims personally, I remained convinced that about all that could have been done, was done, to let people know where they probably shouldn't be – given the experts' opinions of what was expected to happen with the mountain.

This included Gerry Martin, a communications comrade and Ham operator who was part of the Emergency Services Department amateur network (RACES and ARES) set up to monitor and report actions of the mountain. He was the person who reported the 8:42 a.m. eruption live (until the blast buried him). Martin's reports came into our amateur network control,

RACES Office Reade Apgar, who in turn reported the event to the department duty officer, Joel Aggergard. The next call Apgar made was to me. From that morning through the next five days of little or no sleep, working around the clock at the old State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) on Martin Way, things are a blur!

The staff of the department at that time was about 23 total. To say the facility we called the EOC was totally inadequate, and that we were overwhelmed and understaffed, is a gross understatement, but I forever will be proud of that group. We did the best we could with what we had.

The help we received from other state agencies and volunteers, including people who just walked in off the street was unbelievable. After about a week or so, when all our regular staff had been deployed or were getting some rest, you could walk into the EOC and literally not know a single person.

As the person responsible for emergency communications and warning, it was most frustrating to try to keep all lines and levels of telephone and radio communications links connected to the right people, as well as ensure key alert and warning type information was relayed to key officials at all levels.

As an operational EBS (Emergency Broadcast System)

capability was not in place in this state at the time of the eruption, I remember trying to get TV signals into the EOC with no cable, no satellite, just a local antenna for one TV.

As much as we were ill-prepared as an emergency services entity 20 years ago, I am proud to say that we are probably 1,000 percent better prepared today, not only in trained staff, and competent programs at all levels, but also our new EOC with all its redundant capabilities, including its total high-tech telecommunications and automation capability of which I am most proud!



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